Based upon prior inquiries, explain why translating Psalm 138:2 is linguistically sound: “For you have made your promise great in keeping with your entire reputation.”?

I now have all the accumulated material from today's conversation and these searches to give a thorough, integrated answer. Let me compose it directly from the linguistic evidence.

Drawing on our full day's discussion, here is a comprehensive linguistic defense of the translation **"For you have made your promise great in keeping with your entire reputation."**

The Hebrew Text and Its Components

The clause in question is the final stich of Psalm 138:2 in the Masoretic Text: כִּי הִגְדַּלְתָּ עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ אִמְרָתֶךָ (*kî higdaltā ʿal-kol-šimkā ʾimrātekhā*). The translation advances four specific lexical and syntactic claims, each of which is independently defensible from the Hebrew.[1]

"Your Promise" — אִמְרָתֶךָ (*ʾimrātekhā*)

The noun *ʾimrāh* (H565) is a feminine form derived from the root אמר ("to say") and appears 37 times in the Hebrew Bible . While its broadest gloss is "word" or "utterance," its semantic range demonstrably includes deliberate divine declarations that carry binding, covenantal force — what English naturally renders as "promise" . Lamentations 2:17 uses *ʾimrāh* for a divine decree that *will be fulfilled*, and Psalm 119 repeatedly pairs it with concepts of trust and steadfast expectation . Rendering *ʾimrātekhā* as "your promise" is therefore not a fabrication but a theologically apt lexical choice within the word's attested semantic range .

"Your Reputation" — שִׁמְךָ (*šimkā*)

The Hebrew noun שֵׁם (*šēm*) means "name" in its most literal sense, but the semantic weight it carries in Biblical Hebrew far exceeds mere designation . The "name" of God represents His **character, essence, authority, reputation, and public standing** . The expression *lā ʿăśôt šēm* ("to make a name") is used by the builders of Babel (Genesis 11:4) and by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:2) — in both cases referring unmistakably to **reputation and renown**, not a personal label . Biblical scholars describe the divine *šēm* as "not a mere designation but an expression of his very character and power" , and the University of Iowa's Biblical Archaeology resource explicitly notes that *šēm* "can also be used figuratively to represent one's reputation" .

Rendering *šimkā* as "your reputation" — rather than merely "your name" — is therefore a responsible, attested lexical choice .

"Made Great" — הִגְדַּלְתָּ (*hiḡdaltā*)

The verb גָּדַל (*gādal*) in the Hiphil stem (*hiḡdaltā*, second-person singular perfect) means "to cause to become great," "to magnify," or "to make large in honor" . Both BDB and Strong's confirm the Hiphil carries the causative-transitive sense: *to make great* . Rendering this as "you have made great" (or equivalently, "you have made…great") is therefore uncontroversial and strictly literal .

The Critical Syntactic Move — עַל־כָּל (*ʿal-kol*)

This is the most exegetically contested element, and where the translation's linguistic soundness rests most heavily. The preposition עַל (*ʿal*) carries a broad semantic range: "over," "above," "upon," "against," "according to," "in conformity with," and "in keeping with" . The dominant tradition (KJV, NASB, ESV) reads *ʿal* as comparative — "above all your name" — making the *ʾimrāh* surpass the *šēm* in dignity . However, *ʿal* can equally bear a **normative or conformative sense** — "in accordance with," "in keeping with," "consistent with" — a usage well documented in compound prepositional idioms like עַל פִּי (*ʿal pî*, "according to the mouth of") .

When the translation reads "in keeping with your entire reputation," it deploys *ʿal* in precisely this normative register: God's promise-keeping is **commensurate with, congruent with,** and a full expression of His total reputation. This syntactic choice also has the decisive grammatical advantage of **preserving** כֹּל (*kol*) — "all, the whole, entire" — a word many comparative renderings awkwardly suppress or relegate to "above all things" without clear textual warrant . The NASB's own normative use of *ʿal* in other contexts shows this reading is not exceptional but a recognized idiom .

The Theological Paradox Resolved

The comparative reading ("your word/promise above all your name") creates a genuine theological tension: it implies a hierarchy in which God's spoken utterances outrank His own identity and being . This has puzzled commentators throughout the history of interpretation . The normative reading — "in keeping with your entire reputation" — resolves this paradox elegantly: God fulfills His promises **at the full measure of who He is**, without implying any ranked subordination of His name to His word . This is both theologically coherent and consistent with the psalm's broader doxological movement of praising God's *hesed* and *ʾemet* (steadfast love and faithfulness) .

Standing Alongside Established Translations

The translation occupies a defensible minority position alongside the NASB stream, which also preserves all the Hebrew words . Unlike some paraphrases that suppress *kol* or emend the text, this rendering:

- Translates every lexical element of the MT without omission or emendation
- Uses semantic ranges for *ʾimrāh*, *šēm*, and *ʿal* that are each independently attested in scholarly lexicons (BDB, HALOT, Strong's)
- Resolves the theological paradox posed by the comparative reading without resorting to textual emendation
- Corresponds closely in spirit to the NASB's "You have magnified Your word in accordance with all Your name"

As established in our prior analysis, the translation is most accurately described as a **linguistically credible, theologically motivated rendering** that occupies a defensible minority position — not the majority translation, but one that respects every word of the Masoretic Text while deploying recognized semantic and syntactic options for *ʿal*, *šēm*, and *ʾimrāh* .

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